



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Having: Property and possession in religious and social life

Citation for published version:

Northcott, MS 2007, 'Having: Property and possession in religious and social life', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, vol. 60, no. 4, pp. 490-492. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930605001249>

Digital Object Identifier (DOI):

[10.1017/S0036930605001249](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0036930605001249)

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Published In:

Scottish Journal of Theology

Publisher Rights Statement:

©Northcott, M. S. (2007). Having: Property and possession in religious and social life. *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 60(4), 490-492doi: 10.1017/S0036930605001249

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



Scottish Journal of Theology

<http://journals.cambridge.org/SJT>

Additional services for ***Scottish Journal of Theology***:

Email alerts: [Click here](#)

Subscriptions: [Click here](#)

Commercial reprints: [Click here](#)

Terms of use : [Click here](#)



**Schweiker William and Mathewes Charles, eds,
Having: Property and Possession in Religious
and Social Life (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans,
2004), pp. x + 415. £24.99.**

Michael S. Northcott

Scottish Journal of Theology / Volume 60 / Issue 04 / November 2007, pp 490 - 492
DOI: 10.1017/S0036930605001249, Published online: 23 October 2007

Link to this article: http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0036930605001249

How to cite this article:

Michael S. Northcott (2007). Scottish Journal of Theology, 60, pp 490-492
doi:10.1017/S0036930605001249

Request Permissions : [Click here](#)

Although it is preoccupied with the correction of theological misapprehensions, *God is Not...* concludes with a decidedly positive assertion of who God is. These observations, namely that 'God Is One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic', are considered in connection with the church; according to Laytham, it is the church that is called to say and show who God is and what God is not. Thus we note that these essays do not identify the canker of contemporary culture as the root cause of current theological confusion. It is rather the church's failure to embody what God is that the authors identify as the root problem. Admitting that these essays may possibly fall short of their goal, Laytham acknowledges the potential for a lack of critical thought or rhetorical skill on the part of the authors. However, and here he demonstrates some rhetorical flair, the failure of these essays 'May also be due to the failure of the Church to embody the truth that God is not American. It may be due to the failure of the Church to live the kindness of God. It may be due to the Church's captivity to capitalism, unable or unwilling to imagine the abundance of God's economy... Where the Church fails to embody truly what God is, the world is left to believe in various not-gods.'

God is Not... offers a provocative analysis of contemporary American Christianity that will enlighten many and offend some. Those interested in cultural questions and those involved in the theological teaching of students and interested lay-people will find this a highly accessible and useful resource.

Stuart Noble

St Mary's College, St Andrews

doi:10.1017/S0036930605001249

William Schweiker and Charles Mathewes, eds, *Having: Property and Possession in Religious and Social Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2004), pp. x + 415. £24.99.

The outcome of a three-year research project on property and wealth, this book provides many insights into the morality of having in a culture of material excess. Patrick Miller's essay on the Ten Commandments provides a powerful reading of the eighth – 'Thou shalt not steal' – which argues that it was first and foremost a commandment about not enslaving fellow Israelites, or in other words about the kinds of things Israelites ought and ought not to have: they were not to *have* one another. In a fine essay on Chrysostom Margaret Mitchell reviews his prophetic critique of luxuriant wealth, while Jean Elshtain affirms that, since their bodies do not belong to them but to God, Christians ought to reject the project of self-possession advanced by technologies which promise to perfect and prolong human life. And Christine Hinze suggests that prolonged familiarity with modern

conveniences undermines human character and is at the heart of the modern obsession with acquiring too much stuff. She also gives a name to the ordering theme to many of these essays, which is the dynamics of desire.

Augustine is the theologian to whom most of these essayists turn in their critique of a culture of greed and excess, for, as Charles Mathewes argues, his theological accounts of use and misuse of the world provide powerful insights into the psychological disorder that idolatrous loves produce. William Schweiker draws on classical sociological insight in further elaborating an Augustinian approach to the problem of consumer excess: he memorably and insightfully defines the greedy person as one who 'wants to possess all of a culture's highest riches and thus, implicitly, to have her or his desires absorbed into and defined by the society's value system' (p. 256). In this perspective covetousness disorders the soul because it subjects the individual to a good lower than God, as Aquinas argued, and it leads ultimately to a loss of self and of identity as the individual's desires are subsumed into cravings for socially defined wealth. The paradox is that this over-identification with social power in a consumer society leads not to greater communal engagement but to the isolation of the self as greed erodes social bonds.

Günter Thomas suggests that Christians need a regeneration of their attentive powers so that their awareness can be redirected towards that which is truly life giving, and that worshipping communities should play a central role in this regeneration. Deirdre McCloskey puts in a defence of capitalism, arguing that the problem with modern economics is not its success in making people wealthy but rather its failure to attend to fairness, and to God. But Katherine Tanner in a powerful concluding essay suggests that there are basic conceptual problems in modern economics which only a theological critique can properly resolve. Against the foundational concept of property elaborated by John Locke she notes the proposal of John Milbank and others for a recovery of economic exchange as gift exchange wherein market behaviours are reconnected with social networks and relationships. However, Tanner suggests that the proper model for gift exchange is not Marcel Mauss's anthropological one but the divine Trinity. God as Trinity exchanges God's being with Godself, and, in the incarnation and the gift of the spirit, with human beings, and this suggests a mode of being and of having which eschews exclusive possession and competitive relations. Non-exclusive possession and shared rights of use are the theological ways out of the modern cultural obsessions with private property and consumption.

Accessible to preachers and pastors as well as to students and scholars the authors of this attractively produced volume have produced a fine resource which provides not only strong critique but theologically rich alternatives

to the materialism of late modernity. The principal lacuna is the lack of attention paid to the many different traditions of Christian mysticism and contemplation which provide powerful resources for turning desires for having into love of being. And alongside this fairly serious failing the book has another: despite a fine array of bibliographical commentary it lacks an index, which reduces its value as a scholarly resource.

Michael S. Northcott

University of Edinburgh

doi:10.1017/S0036930605001262

Stanley J. Grenz, *Rediscovering the Triune God: The Trinity in Contemporary Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004), pp. vii + 289. \$23.00.

Anyone looking for a thorough, balanced, informative, well-written and accessible overview of twentieth-century trinitarian theology will want to read this book. In masterful fashion Stanley Grenz narrates the revival of trinitarian theology that took place in the eighty years that extended from Barth's *Epistle to the Romans* to T. F. Torrance's *The Christian Doctrine of God* which he describes as the 'last comprehensive trinitarian theological offering of the century' (p. 3).

By focusing on four major topical areas and analysing the thought of eleven prominent contemporary theologians in order to explicate those topics, Grenz divides his book as follows: (1) the eclipse of the doctrine and its renewal as this took place especially in the thinking of Barth and Rahner; (2) seeing the Trinity as the 'Fullness of Divine History' especially in the thinking of Moltmann, Pannenberg and Jenson who saw the identity of the triune God 'as arising out of the interplay of the three trinitarian members within the flow of history' (p. 5); (3) understanding the Trinity in terms of social trinitarianism and relational ontology in the thought of Boff, Zizioulas and LaCugna; and finally (4) considering what Grenz characterises as 'The Return of the Immanent Trinity' by focusing on the thought of Elizabeth Johnson, Hans Urs von Balthasar and T. F. Torrance.

Grenz begins by offering a brief and helpful history of the doctrine, including developments in East and West, and then explains how medieval speculation about the Trinity, by separating the Treatises on the One and Triune God and by divorcing trinitarian thinking from practical experience in the church, eventually led to the doctrine's demise. According to Grenz the doctrine came to be 'eclipsed' by thinking that focused on Christ's benefits instead of the unity and trinity of God himself and then by Unitarian and other Enlightenment-style thinking. Next, beginning with Schleiermacher and Hegel, Grenz shows how interest in the doctrine began to revive during the nineteenth century. Strangely, Grenz seems to side